

Pastor Jon's Sermon from July31/August1

Text: Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15 and John 6:24-35

“God Is With Us in Our Transitions and Unknowns”

Think of a time when you moved from one place to another. Why did you move?

Was it a job change? A move to be near family or a support system? Did you go to college or go into the military? Was it a forced move due to things like finances, health issues, a death, divorce, or covid?

What emotions go along with moving from one place to another?

-fear and trembling as you walk into the unknown?

-hope and excitement as you imagine the new place and possibilities?

-grief as you leave the old place and all the people?

-relief in leaving certain things or people behind?

-Thankfulness?

-Complaining?

As I look at the lessons for today, I think of how important place is in our lives and how important it is to trust in God to provide for us as we move from one place to another. It is also important to stay in touch with God during our transitions. God wants to hear from us. God is listening... even when we complain.

Things seem to be changing everywhere. Much of it is out of our direct control, but scary nevertheless. As I was driving this morning to pick up our dog from my brother in Stevens Point, I noticed how hazy it was outside. I turned on the news and it said the haze was from the fires out West. It hits home. Then, as I watched the Olympics I saw how Simone Biles, one of the greatest gymnasts of all time, opted out of her gymnastics events due to mental health challenges. People are struggling right now emotionally. Then there is the Delta variant of Covid... it is moving us from a place of relative calm to anxiety and fear again. I don't want to go back

there... but will do whatever it takes, even if that means putting the mask back on.

In our first lesson for today, the whole congregation of the Israelites moved from one place, Egypt to another place... the wilderness. Egypt represented stability, food, and a routine. They were slaves, however in Egypt, but they knew what each day would look like. The wilderness was anything but. It was the great unknown. Food was scarce. In our text for today, the people complained against Moses and Aaron, wishing they were back in Egypt where they knew where their next meal would come from. They would rather die as slaves in Egypt than by hunger in the wilderness. How quickly they forgot what God had done for them moving them from slavery into freedom?

God heard the complaining of the people and told Moses and Aaron that I will rain down bread... but only enough for that day as a test. And God would also provide meat at night so that, "They shall know that I am the Lord your God." God wanted the people to learn to trust God again. God followed through on God's end providing manna and quail daily except on the Sabbath, but the people didn't follow God's commands or instructions on how much to take and when to take it. Some people hoarded, others got lazy.

I see grace in this text. As Lutherans, we always look for the grace. God hears the people's complaints. God responds to the complaints directed toward Moses and Aaron by providing what the Israelites needed. They ate Manna for 40 years in the wilderness.

One scholar wrote, "God acknowledges not only the Israelites' need for assurance but also God's desire to shape them as a different kind of people, a different kind of community. In the ritual practice of daily gathering of food that falls from the sky, they will learn, with their very bodies, to come to trust their god; they will learn to share their basic human resources equitably." Amy Erickson. God wanted the people to trust God again and die from the example of greed and hoarding the people witnessed the Egyptians doing when they were slaves.

Finally, God is big enough to hear our complaints. Sometimes we feel God isn't listening... or that God has bigger fish to fry. It is important to cry out to God when things aren't well in our world or in our lives. God hears us and doesn't give up on us... even when we don't live up to our end of the bargain. God sends prophets and apostles to carry God's message of hope and justice for all. God sent a Son into the world to show us the way and put us in a right relationship with God even when we don't deserve it.

In our Gospel for today from John 6, Jesus just fed 5000. When people were hungry again, they came back to that place, but Jesus wasn't there. When they found Jesus, he told them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." Never hungry, never thirsty? They are like, sir, give us this bread always. They were still thinking of physical bread.

It seems we are always hungering for more. More stuff. More of everything. But Jesus says come to me... believe in me... and you will never be hungry. You are enough and you will have enough.

Simply believing in Jesus or placing our ultimate trust in him will satisfy your deepest hungers and thirsts and give you eternal life. In John's Gospel, eternal life begins when you come to know Jesus.

I love the idea of Jesus as the bread of life. When I think of bread, I think of the rolls at the Texas Roadhouse Steakhouse with the cinnamon butter. They melt in your mouth. You eat them, and you are totally satisfied for a moment in time, but you are hungry again the next day. But knowing Jesus as God's son and savior helps me to feel content with who I am and what my future holds.

What are you hungering for right now? For me, who is well fed, I hunger for things like peace in our world and in our own families. I hunger for grace and forgiveness daily. I hunger for answers and truth as a leader in the church to help lead us through yet another variant of Covid. I hunger for the earth to have rest from the fires and drought.

Come and fill us Lord Jesus.